

The Means of preserving the Life and
Power of Religion in a Time of ge-
neral Corruption.

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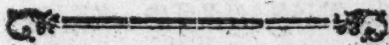
V A L E D I C T O R Y

S E R M O N,

T O T H E

INHABITANTS OF DUNDEE.

By JOHN SNODGRASS.



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T O
THE INHABITANTS
OF THE TOWN AND PARISH
OF DUNDEE,
ESPECIALLY TO THOSE THAT BELONG
TO THE OVERGATE DISTRICT,
IN TESTIMONY OF THE MOST SINCERE
AND PERMANENT CONCERN
FOR THEIR PROSPERITY AND HAPPINESS,
THE FOLLOWING SERMON
IS INSCRIBED,
BY
THEIR AFFECTIONATE PASTOR
AND EVER OBEDIENT SERVANT
IN THE LORD JESUS,
JOHN SNODGRASS.

THE INHABITANTS

OF THE TOWN AND PARISH

OF DUNDEE,

ESPECIALLY TO THOSE THAT BELONG

TO THE DISTRICT

ERRATA.

- P. 13. l. 6. for *encompassed*, read *compassed*.
P. 23. l. 1. for *we*, read *they*.
P. 32. l. 23. for *where*, read *when*.
P. 34. l. 3. for *least*, read *left*.

THE FOLLOWING

IS INSCRIBED,

BY

THEIR ATTENTIONATE PASTOR

AND EVER CREDIT SERVANT

IN THE LORD JESUS

JOHN SNODGRASS

The Means of preserving the Life and Power of Religion in a Time of general Corruption.

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S E R M O N, &c.

J U D E 20, 21.

But ye beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto eternal life.

TH E epistle of which these words are a part, was written at a time when certain ungodly men had crept into the church, who “ turned the grace of God into licentiousness, and denied the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ;” who “ defiled the flesh, despised dominion, and spake evil of dignities, and walked after their own lusts.” To secure the faithful from being seduced into these pernicious errors, seems to have been the main design of the holy Spirit in
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this part of the sacred writings. For this purpose the inspired penman puts them in mind of the words that had been spoken before by the apostles of the Lord; how they told them that "there should be mockers in the last time, walking after their own ungodly lusts;" and he does not hesitate to affirm, that these were some of the persons whom they had in their view. After having warned his Christian brethren of the danger to which they stood exposed from this quarter, he gives them the most suitable directions for their security and comfort, in the words of the text: "But ye beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

I am sorry to observe, that the circumstances in which we are placed are so similar in this respect to the situation of those early Christians; and consequently that this exhortation is so very applicable to us in its utmost extent and meaning. But as this is unhappily our present condition, it is from a serious persuasion of the difficulty of maintaining the Christian character in such circumstances, and of the hazard which

which you run of being ruined by the deceitfulness of sin, that I propose a little to discourse upon it.

In the words themselves we have these two particulars :

I. What should be the great object of your concern, as Christians, in your journey through this world ; namely, to keep yourselves in the love of God.

II. The way in which you may maintain this heavenly and distinguishing temper ; which is, by building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the holy Ghost, and looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

And to illustrate and apply these two particulars, shall be the subject of the following discourse.

The first thing then to be considered is, that it should be the great object of your concern, as Christians, to keep yourselves in the love of God. I hope it is unnecessary to spend much of your time upon this part of the subject : you are not now to be informed, that the love of God must always be the sum and substance of true religion in every period of the church. This is that

law which was written upon the heart of man at his creation, in obedience to which he should have been perfectly holy and happy through immortal ages : and though we have fallen from this divine affection by our apostacy and guilt, yet it is the great design of the gospel to recover us again unto it, and bring us under its prevailing power.

But I understand the expression here more especially to denote the lively and vigorous exercise of all the religious and devout affections in the soul of a Christian; and that the exhortation to those persons to keep themselves in the love of God, immediately refers to the danger they were in of becoming faint and languid by reason of the wickedness which prevailed around them. Our blessed Saviour delivered a prediction, which, though it seems to relate to a particular period, yet has been often accomplished in the experience of the saints; That “because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold*.” This must always be the case in a time of general corruption, when the people of God have any considerable intercourse with the world,

world. Such is the structure of the human mind, that the frequent repetition of wickedness diminishes our sense of the evil of it, and consequently makes us less fearful of its approach, and less anxious to secure ourselves against it. And therefore, when a person is much accustomed to behold the conversation of the wicked, the effect of it must either be, to drive him from their society, or make him in some measure to conform to their ungodly behaviour.

The danger I am now speaking of is chiefly to be found in places of no very great extent, where people of all sorts of characters are connected together, and where custom has unhappily established a promiscuous intercourse among them. In such situations we seldom meet with persons who have judgement and fortitude enough to deviate from the common and prevailing practice; and this is one of the principal causes why religion, in the souls of many, continues in so unflourishing a state. Indeed how can it be otherwise, when people of such various and opposite tempers consort together, when they are engaged in the same amusements, and spend the vacant hour alike; and when, by mutual

tual compliances, they endeavour, but in vain, to make the most jarring and incongruous dispositions to harmonize? Such a habit of restraint cannot but be very unfriendly to the spiritual interests of the saints. It is an additional weight imposed upon the religious principle, which has enough to check it already from the influence of remaining corruption. And when they have little opportunity of hearing any thing but the language of the world, except when it is publicly contradicted in the church, is it any wonder, that the springs of piety and devotion should be relaxed within them, and that the ardour of their pursuit after the great invisible objects of eternity should begin to abate? "Can the flag grow without water?" Or can a delicate exotic be nursed up without the most tender care, amidst the rigours of an inhospitable climate? Just so religion, which is by no means congenial to the natural tendencies of the human mind, can never arrive at any considerable degree of vigour, without being either miraculously protected amidst the rude and injurious assaults of the wicked, or put as much as possible beyond their reach.

Upon this account it is, that in large
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and populous cities, where it is impossible to maintain a general correspondence, and where every person is left to select companions suited to his own particular genius and dispositions, there is a remarkable distinction to be observed between the righteous and the wicked. Each party following out their own principles and views, perceive the impropriety, and indeed, absurdity of cramping and fettering their inclinations by the presence of those who are of an opposite character. And therefore it is found, that, as in these places, there are perhaps the most finished examples of wickedness that are any where to be met with, so there are likewise the most lively and the most active Christians. The reason of this is plain to every attentive enquirer: for as they have no more connection with the world than what is necessary for carrying on their secular affairs, the freedom of their intercourse one with another must rouse their emulation, and tend greatly to promote their mutual comfort and joy; while the horrors of that impiety with which they are every where surrounded, will serve only as a *stimulus* to make them fortify themselves against it.

Therefore I have often thought, that of
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all the temptations to which a Christian is exposed from his connection with the world, perhaps none is more dangerous than that which arises from the society of those who are outwardly regular and decent in their deportment, but, at the same time, are strangers to the influence of real religion upon the heart. Here is nothing to be seen which can shock the feelings of a pious mind. On the contrary, all is promising and hopeful, and invites to a pleasant and not unprofitable intercourse. But it is from this very circumstance, that the danger chiefly arises. For as religion, in these persons, can be nothing but a tedious round of heartless formalities, and as charity obliges us to entertain a favourable opinion concerning them; the frequency of their conversation, which still must proceed upon the principles and maxims of the world, must have a powerful, though imperceptible tendency to cool the fervour of every holy affection, and to reduce us to the same state of careless indifference with themselves. And when profligateness and formality come to be the prevailing characters of any people, as they certainly are amongst us at present, it must be extremely difficult

difficult for the real people of God to maintain their ground.

You see then, brethren, how well the exhortation in the text is suited to your particular circumstances, and how much it should be your concern, who are encompassed about with so many dangers, to keep yourselves in the love of God. I hope you are disposed to make this the object of your principal study, and are anxious to be directed in such an important business; and therefore I now go on upon the second part of the subject, to shew you how you may maintain this heavenly and distinguishing temper. The apostle directs you to do it, by building up yourselves on your most holy faith — by praying in the holy ghost — and looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. Each of these directions deserves to be distinctly illustrated.

The first is, that you are to endeavour to keep yourselves in the love of God, or to maintain the spirit and life of religion within you, by building up yourselves on your most holy faith. This is a direction which, although of the greatest moment, seems

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not to be commonly attended to, or understood. There are many who think that if they have a general notion of the essential doctrines of the gospel, and can distinguish them from what is spurious, and of human invention, they need go no further, because this is sufficient for salvation; while others give themselves little concern, whither what they believe in matters of religion be true or false, founding their hopes of the divine acceptance chiefly upon the virtues of a well spent life. One cannot help being surprised to hear persons, by no means deficient in natural understanding and sagacity, talking upon this subject in a manner in which they would be ashamed to talk upon any other art or science whatever. Is not truth the great object which the human mind pursues in all its investigations? Where is the man of inquiry, who would reckon it of no consequence what system he adopted in philosophy, in history, in government, or even in the ordinary conduct of life? Do we not see people every day contending about these subjects with the greatest zeal, and at pains to settle the minutest circumstances which belong to them? And do we not find, that the judgment cannot be satisfied, without

persuading

persuading itself, at least, that it has arrived at the truth; although it must be confessed that it is often employed upon such trifling and insignificant objects as appear equally ridiculous and contemptible? But as religion is a science which is wholly practical, and provides not only for our comfort in the present world, but for our happiness in the next, it must be of the last consequence to us to be rightly instructed in it. And let me observe, that those persons who affect to make light of the sacred doctrines which it contains, do only condemn themselves in the judgment which they pass upon it; because none are readier to cry out against the pernicious effects of superstition and enthusiasm, in corrupting the manners of mankind. Now, if false principles of religion have such a powerful influence over the human heart, should not the truth of God itself, when it is sincerely believed, and received into the soul, be allowed to have a similar and corresponding energy? This, by the way, is a further confutation of the above unreasonable and delusive maxim, as it shews that there can be no good and holy practice without proceeding from the principles of true religion within us; so that the judgment even of the men

of the world themselves ought in all consistency, to accord with the doctrine of scripture upon this point, when it ascribes a renewing and sanctifying influence to the truth. "If ye know the truth," says our Saviour to his disciples, "the truth shall make you free." And in another place, "Now are ye clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." And in his intercessory prayer for them, "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth."

But I must turn my discourse again to those who are properly the objects of it; I mean persons who have some general impressions of the precious doctrines of the gospel, but are too little assiduous in making further improvements, and therefore their spiritual affections continue in a very low and languishing state. It is indeed extremely difficult to suppose a want of religious curiosity, as I may call it, or of a thirst for religious knowledge in those to whom the beauty and excellency of the gospel have ever been truly revealed. And yet this principle is certainly very weak and inactive in the souls of many; otherwise it is impossible to account for their continuing from year to year under the means of instruction, without making any real or visible progress.

gress. This is a circumstance that deserves to be seriously pondered by us, whose office it is to teach you these heavenly truths; least we should not illustrate them with that plainness, nor press them with that earnestness which may be best fitted to the use of edifying. But it does in no respect alleviate or excuse your blame. For if you were exercising earnest desires and endeavours to obtain further discoveries of spiritual objects, it is not to be doubted but God would find out proper instruments and means of conveying the knowledge of them to your minds.

I pretend not to determine what precise degree of knowledge may be sufficient for salvation. Perhaps this may vary considerably, according to the different characters of men, and the particular situations in which they may be placed. Persons of very strong and violent passions, will probably stand in need of more affecting discoveries of the motives of religion, to correct the impetuosity of their temper, and prevent them from running into extravagance, than those who are of mild and gentle dispositions. And persons who are placed in very difficult and hazardous situations, will require more of that "wisdom which is profitable
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“ble to direct,” as well as of that fortitude which arises from a lively perception of the great objects of eternity, to preserve them from making “shipwreck of the faith, and of a good conscience,” than others who are in circumstances comparatively safe and easy: So that this is a question, which it is, perhaps, impossible for any mortal to decide. But I am certain that if the knowledge of the truth be good for any thing at all; if it be, as the scripture assures us it is, the means of sanctifying and saving a sinful and perishing world; the more we make proficiency in this important knowledge, and feel the impressions of it upon our hearts, we must be the more “delivered from the bondage of corruption,” and restored “into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

A very small reflection may convince you of this. What is it that first brings the sinner to Christ, that he may obtain salvation? Is it not a persuasion of his own lost and miserable state by nature; and that he, and he alone, is both able and willing to save him? And must not the same principle, gradually unfolded, make him to abide in him continually, and improve him for all the purposes of his sanctification and peace?

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What is it that fills the believer with gratitude to his benevolent and divine Redeemer, and binds him with the strongest ties of obligation to him? Is it not a sense of his unmerited and stupendous love shed abroad upon his heart by the holy Ghost? And is it any thing else than a growing perception of the excellency and glory of God, as he has revealed himself to us in the face of Jesus Christ, that makes us to delight in communion with him, and desire above all things to be transformed into his image?

It were easy to shew, that all the commandments of God would be of no effect, were it not for the manifestation of those truths which are connected with them. For instance, the commandment to hate and abstain from sin, could never be obeyed, without a discovery of its inherent turpitude and malignity. The commandment to love the Lord with all our heart, would have no sort of efficacy upon us at all, without a discovery of his infinite amiableness to excite and draw forth our affections to him. — These, and such as these, are the principles of real holiness in the soul; and the more we can keep in view these invisible realities, and the more clearly we
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are enabled to take a survey of them, the more we must be under their prevailing power.

Accordingly it is remarkable, that the scripture always supposes progress in the spiritual life, to be necessarily connected with advancement in religious knowledge; this being, as it were, the food by which it is nourished up to perfection. "We look not," says the apostle, "at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen;" and therefore, "though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." And again, "We all, with open face, beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord." Christians likewise are exhorted to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom to know is life eternal;" and in the text they are directed "to keep themselves in the love of God, by building up themselves on their most holy faith;" still adding new degrees of religious knowledge; just as a person who is employed in erecting an house or temple, adds one

stone

stone unto another, without which the building could never be completed.

I have only further to observe, upon this part of the subject, that this beautiful metaphor which the apostle makes use of, supposes, that the foundation be firmly laid upon the Rock of ages, in whom alone all our hopes of mercy and happiness must rest; that the structure to be raised upon it, consist of all the precious truths and doctrines of the gospel; and that the souls of believers, by pious and delightful meditation, dwell continually among them, as the means of their security and comfort in this evil world, till they receive the mercy of the Lord unto eternal life.

Let us now turn our attention to the second direction which the apostle offers, — That you are to keep yourselves in the love of God, or endeavour to maintain the life and power of religion within you, by praying in the holy Ghost. — The propriety with which this direction is introduced, is too striking to pass unobserved. The doctrines of the gospel, when they are set home with power upon the conscience, seem to be the first movers of the soul in matters of religion. They awaken and alarm

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larm us, all benumbed and stupified with corruption; they make us to feel our danger, and teach us the only method of recovery from it. But these very doctrines likewise inform us, that as the blessings of redemption are, by the appointment of the Father, treasured up in Christ, to be bestowed freely upon his people, we cannot procure them by any art or endeavours of our own; but must daily exercise a humble dependence on Christ, together with earnest supplications at the throne of grace, that we may obtain them. Therefore the apostle directs us to be instant in prayer, after having first exhorted us to build up ourselves on our most holy faith; where we not only learn the importance and necessity of this duty, and the manner in which it should be performed, but likewise are supplied with materials for it.

It deserves further to be remarked, how much the exercises of piety and devotion, which the gospel requires, are adapted to the feelings of the human heart, and in some respects, indeed, are grafted upon them. Nothing is more natural to men, than to apply to invisible power for relief, upon occasion of any distress or calamity
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with which we are visited. This the Psalmist describes in a very graphical manner, Ps. cvii. 26. in the case of those who are exposed to imminent danger upon the great waters; "They mount up to the heaven; " they go down again to the depths; their " soul is melted because of trouble. They " reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. " Then they cry unto the Lord, in their " trouble, and he bringeth them out of " their dittresses." There is another passage to the same purpose, Ps. lxxviii. 34. "When " he slew them then they sought him, and " they returned and enquired early after " God; and they remembered that God was " their rock, and the high God their redeemer. Nevertheless, they did flatter " him with their mouth, and they lied " unto him with their tongues. For their " heart was not right with him; neither " were they stedfast in his covenant." It appears then, that wicked men call upon God in the time of their calamity, as well as the saints. But here lies the distinguishing difference between their prayers. The one is only the language of nature; whereas the other is the inspiration of the holy Ghost. And therefore, while the wicked

are impelled to court the favour of the Almighty, merely by the terrors of his vengeance, the righteous draw near unto him as their exceeding joy. They come with humble confidence and hope, patiently submitting to the will of his providence; and desiring nothing more than that he would cause the light of his countenance to shine upon them, and make all things co-operate to promote their spiritual benefit.

It is needless to enter into a tedious explanation of what the apostle means, by directing us to pray in the holy Ghost, as both scripture and experience teach us that we are unable to prefer our petitions to him, in any proper or acceptable manner, without his gracious assistance. Hear what the apostle Paul says, Rom. viii. 26, 27. "Likewise the Spirit also
 " helpeth our infirmities; for we know
 " not what we should pray for as we
 " ought, but the spirit itself maketh intercession for us, with groanings which
 " cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts, knoweth what is the
 " mind of the Spirit; because he maketh intercession for the saints, according to
 " the will of God." I know that this
 passage

passage has been looked upon as hard to
 be understood; as it seems to make the
 holy Spirit to act the part of a mediator
 for us, by interceding in our behalf,
 contrary to what the scripture hath said,
 that there is but "one mediator between
 God and man, the man Christ Jesus."
 But this difficulty will entirely vanish if
 we attentively consider the apostle's words.
 For the Spirit is not here said to intercede
 for us in the strict and proper mean-
 ing of that expression, as is evident from
 the manner in which he makes inter-
 cession; which is by "groanings which
 cannot be uttered." But the Spirit
 himself does not groan. He only ex-
 cites these ardent desires and affections in
 our souls which give rise to this exter-
 nal sign. So that the whole meaning
 of the intercession of the Spirit in our
 behalf, consists in his helping our in-
 firmities—teaching us what things we
 should pray for as we ought—enabl-
 ing us to order our cause before God,
 and filling our mouths with arguments—
 but chiefly in his over-powering the mind,
 sometimes, to such a degree, that we
 cannot express our desires and petitions
 in any articulate language; and there-
 fore

fore must give vent to them by groanings; which he who knows what is the mind of the Spirit, will shew that he can well interpret, by sending us an answer of peace.

The same thing is further confirmed by the experience of the saints. How often do you, my friends, feel not only the utility, but even the necessity of the assistance of the spirit, in your devotions? When he with-holds his enlightening and enlivening energies, are not your minds instantly beclouded—your hearts straitened and oppressed—and all the powers of religion within you at once enteebled and shut up? But when he bestows his kind and genial influence, how delightful the change which is immediately produced. Then your prayers are “set forth before him as incense”—your souls are lifted up to him upon the wings of faith, and hope, and charity, and every heaven-born grace—and you are taught better than, by a thousand arguments, what is the meaning of that saying, “That where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” This is that “effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man, which availeth much.” And it

is what the apostle means by Christians praying in the Holy Ghost.

The happy tendency of this pious exercise to increase and strengthen the religious principle, is evident, almost, without any illustration. Prayer is the great appointed means of deriving spiritual blessings from God. He has promised to bestow them upon those that ask him; and has directed us to come unto him that we may receive them. "If any man lack wisdom;" that is, spiritual heavenly wisdom, the best of all blessings, "let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him."

But prayer is not only the appointed means of obtaining spiritual blessings; it has likewise a direct and immediate efficacy upon the heart. It keeps the soul attentive to its everlasting interests, and impresses it with the importance of invisible objects. Do you see a man deeply penetrated with a sense of sin, coming unto God, and earnestly imploring his mercy to pardon him, and his grace to deliver him from it; must he not, so long as he retains these sentiments, keep at a distance from a thing which he considers as the greatest
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of all evils, and, in some respect, as the only evil that can befall him? Do you see him solemnly renouncing all temporal enjoyments, as vain and unsatisfying, and cleaving to God as his only portion; if he carry this frame along with him into the world, will it not surmount the temptations which arise from its deceitful allurements? And must not the frequent contemplation of the highest perfection, have a strong, though silent influence in forming us into a divine character, and making us like unto God? These are certainly the natural effects of a devout and pious disposition. And wherever it predominates in any great degree, it will not fail to produce them in the conversation and the life.

If, therefore, you have received this spirit of grace and supplication, you cannot be too careful to improve such a precious benefit. You should continue in prayer, and watch in the same with all perseverance. You should labour to maintain, as much as possible, a devotional frame, and lift up your souls unto God in pious ejaculations upon every occasion; adoring his infinite Majesty, praising him for his mercies, and requesting new supplies of grace
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and instruction from him, according to the particular duties or trials to which you may be called. This attentive observation and improvement of the conduct of providence, will keep you continually in the presence of God. It will make you to lead a life of communion with him. And as every faculty of the soul is strengthened by exercise, the full scope which is given to all those sentiments and affections, of which he is the object, cannot but invigorate these holy dispositions, and make you more spiritual and heavenly minded every day.

This brings me to the last of these important directions; which is, that you should keep yourselves in the love of God, by looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto eternal life. The meaning of this direction is easy to be understood. The apostle had certainly in his eye, to recommend to Christians the serious contemplation of the divine mercy, not in its progress, but in its final consummation, in the exalted, perpetual felicity of the heavenly state. This is particularly called the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto eternal life; because the scripture repre-

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sents

sents that inestimable privilege as not only purchased, but dispensed by him. "This is the record," says the apostle John, "that God has given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son*." And says our Lord himself, "As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him†."

It would be going beyond the bounds of this discourse, to attempt a description of that inconceivable happiness. All that the subject requires is, to point out the great utility and benefit of a devout and holy contemplation of it, amidst the difficulties and trials of this evil world. And if we consider it aright, it will appear that no exercise of the mind is more immediately and more strongly fitted to bear down the influence of indwelling corruption, to divest temptation of all its force, and to support us under the most distressing calamities that can befall us. This, however, is not to be expected as the effect of a distant ideal speculation, the useless effort of our natural reason. For the objects that are here introduced, like all the other

mysteries

* 1 John v. 11.

† John xvii. 2.

mysteries of revelation, are of so peculiar a quality, that they will ever elude its most assiduous research. It is only when they are unfolded to us by the Spirit, that we are enabled to perceive what they really are. And as this can never be done till the soul be quickened and renewed by a supernatural energy, so we learn from the experience of the saints, that, even they, do not always attain to those clear affecting discoveries of the glories of immortality, and of their interest in them, with which they are frequently favoured. This is a circumstance much to be regretted, as it is the cause why, upon many occasions, they act so unsuitably to their character and views.

Were Christians as much under the influence of these sublime and animating prospects as they ought — were their affections constantly fixed upon heavenly objects — what a dignity of sentiment would this inspire into their breasts? — How would every faculty of their souls be elevated and enlarged by it — and how would the constant comparison of those great invisible realities, with the trifling vanities of time, diminish, I had almost said, annihilate, these in their esteem? Could the expect-

ant of immortal bliss, either pursue with anxiety, or retain with eagerness, the mean uncertain possessions of this temporary scene, if he knew the inestimable value of that inheritance which is "in-
 " corruptible and undefiled, and which
 " fadeth not away," which is reserved for him in the heavens? Could he ever repine at any of the trials and sufferings of this evil world, if he understood the meaning, and could make the comfortable application of what the scripture has declared, That "these light afflictions which
 " are but for a moment, shall work out
 " for us a far more exceeding and eternal
 " weight of glory?" Or could he ever be remiss and inactive in his Christian course, either seduced by the allurements, or intimidated by the terrors with which he is here surrounded, if he perceived the excellency of that glorious prize which is hung out before him?

Go to the first ages of Christianity, where the disciples of a despised Jesus, were detached from the world, and lived visibly as travellers to a heavenly country, and there you shall behold the efficacy of this principle displayed in all its force. These persons are represented as having their eyes

intent

intent upon heavenly objects; as "wait-
 ing for the coming of the Lord;" and
 as having their "conversation in heaven,
 from whence they looked for the Savi-
 our." And what was the consequence?
 Do we not find them "glorying in tribu-
 lation—rejoicing that they were count-
 ed worthy to suffer shame for the name
 of Christ—and cheerfully submitting
 to the spoiling of their goods, knowing
 that they had in heaven a better and an
 enduring substance?" It was this that
 supported the venerable Stephen at his
 martyrdom, the first of the disciples that
 was honoured to seal his testimony with
 his blood: for he saw "the heavens open-
 ed, and Jesus standing at the right hand
 of God," ready to receive him into those
 glorious mansions. And the rapture of
 the apostle Paul into paradise, where he
 heard unspeakable words, which it was
 not lawful for a man to utter," had prob-
 ably no small effect in making him not
 to "count his life dear to himself, that
 he might finish his course with joy."
 This, indeed, seems to have raised his spi-
 rit so much, that perhaps he would scarce-
 ly have considered himself as an inhabitant
 of this lower world again, had it not been
 for

for " a thorn in the flesh, the messenger
 " of Satan" sent, in mercy, " to buffer
 " him, lest he should be exalted above
 " measure. "And though the Christians at
 large, even in that early period, were not
 to expect these extraordinary revelations,
 yet it was by the very same discoveries
 laid open to the eye of faith, that they
 were enabled to lead such a holy and
 heavenly life upon the earth, and to make
 such astonishing progress in every spirit-
 ual attainment, " looking for, and hastening
 " unto the coming of the day of God," till
 at length an entrance was " ministered
 " unto them abundantly, into the ever-
 " lasting kingdom of our Lord and Savi-
 " our."

The same exalted character has been ex-
 emplified in after times, by all who have
 been under the influence of this heavenly
 temper. And what is the reason why it is
 not now as frequently to be seen as ever?
 Is the glory of the new Jerusalem already
 tarnished with age, that it can no longer
 captivate the mind by its attractive lustre?
 Is the description of its magnificence be-
 come unintelligible; or the promise of its
 joys uncertain? Or is the manifestation of
 the truth by the spirit less powerful and
 operative

operative now than it was before? None of these, I am persuaded, the most ignorant or thoughtless will imagine. The only reason is, that, too much engaged in the business of time, and having little to animate you, in the tempers of your fellow christians around you, even when your views are extended to those blestful regions, you are not careful enough to prevent the fumes of worldly passion from rising to obscure your prospect; and therefore you feel little of the effects, and shew little of that elevated spirit which the constant, realizing, and delightful survey of these unparalleled glories, is fitted to produce. Are you then emulous of the character of those antient worthies? You must seek for it in the same way in which they obtained it. And you have both their example and the doctrine of the gospel to instruct you, that it is one of the principal means of denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and of living soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world, to be "looking" continually "for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

I now proceed to make application of the truths which have been delivered.

And, first of all, there is one melancholy reflection which will obtrude itself upon the mind of every serious person upon this occasion; and that is, the prevalence of that corruption among us, both in principle and practice, of which the apostle, in the text, so strongly warns us to beware. It is an awful evidence of the deep depravity of the human heart, that the doctrine of divine grace in the gospel, though supported by preceding prophecies, and confirmed by attending miracles, was either discredited, or soon perverted, by the bulk of those to whom it was originally preached. But it brings the matter home to ourselves, to observe, that when that heavenly light has been so wonderfully revived, which in the course of succeeding ages, had been almost totally extinguished, we appear to be but little conducted by its benign direction. Where is now that respect for the Sabbath, that devout attendance upon the public worship, that regard to religion in families, and in secret, which all the aged among us, who have any sense of these important

tant concerns, speak of with so much feeling and regret, as the characteristical features of the former times? On the contrary, is there not a spirit of dissipation, of luxury, of impiety, baneful in its influence, both upon the present and the future, that has pervaded every rank? I might even ask, if this were a proper place for it; where is now that love of liberty, that true patriotism, that fortitude and magnanimity in the defence of our civil and religious privileges, for which our fathers were so remarkably distinguished? And when selfishness, debility, and profaneness, mark the character of any people, is there not reason to fear, that vessels so prepared for destruction, may be made to experience that vengeance, by which providence has often shewn, that there is a God who reigneth upon the earth?

In the second place, The subject we have been treating, as it excites compassion for the ungodly, so it affords to every faithful minister of Christ, an opportunity of addressing the call of the gospel to them. This is precisely in the spirit of the apostle's discourse. For he says, "Of some have
E
others

"others save with fear, pulling them out
 "of the fire." Miserable souls! Often
 have I had occasion to call upon you in this
 particular, this alarming manner. I have
 addressed you by every argument, to mind
 the things that belong to your eternal peace.
 I have endeavoured even to expostulate
 with you, upon the unreasonableness and
 madness of your behaviour. But I am
 deeply sensible that nothing but the pow-
 er and Spirit of God can strike convicti-
 on into your heart. Sad is the thought,
 that in the course of seven revolving years,
 many impenitent sinners, to whom this
 word of the kingdom has been preached,
 are now gone to their place. But what
 shall I say to you who still remain? I
 pretend to no apostolical authority, to
 shake off the dust of my feet against you.
 On the contrary, I hope God has mercy
 reserved for you. But sure I am, unless
 this be the case, the many calls of grace
 you have resisted, and the many offers of
 salvation you have refused, will be a swift
 and terrible witness against you, in the
 day of the Lord. Notwithstanding, a con-
 cern for your everlasting welfare, as well
 as fidelity to the trust committed to me, ob-
 bliges me once more to beseech you, in
 the

the language of the holy Ghost, to "turn
 "from your iniquities, that you may live;"
 and to "flee for refuge, to lay hold on the
 "hope that is set before you. Awake
 "thou that sleepest, and arise from the
 "dead, and Christ shall give thee light.
 "Behold, now is the accepted time, be-
 "hold now is the day of salvation. While,
 "therefore, it is called to-day, hearken to the
 "voice of God, and harden not your hearts."

In the third place, I would improve this
 subject, particularly, for the edification and
 comfort of all real believers. Brethren,
 it is a time of great and general defection
 in which we live. Therefore it is need-
 ful "to exhort you, that you should ear-
 nestly contend for the faith which was
 once delivered to the saints;" and observe,
 there is not a better way, either of re-
 commending it to others, or of rendering
 it profitable and comfortable to yourselves,
 than by shewing, "out of a good con-
 "versation, your works, with meekness
 "of wisdom." I beg leave, therefore, to
 offer two or three advices, which I reckon
 of peculiar moment for you to attend to.
 First, If you wish to put in practice the di-
 rections you have been receiving, you

should "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." It is with sorrow I again repeat, what I have often expressed in your hearing, that while that sacred day is devoted, by some, entirely to the purposes of recreation, or of riot, the idea of its sanctity, even by those of whom better things might be expected, is restricted, in a great measure, to the time of the public worship. This is an opinion which we seem to have borrowed from our neighbouring church. And, without entering into any controversy upon that article, if men would apply common sense to religion, as they do to other things, they could not but see it to be of very hurtful consequence. What benefit can those persons receive from the most excellent instructions that are delivered in public, who, as soon as they return from the house of God, engage in idle visiting, and in vain conversation? How quickly will the truths they have been hearing be forgotten, and every serious impression wear off their minds? And if ever it should come to be the general custom, to waste these precious hours in indolence, or folly, what can be expected, but that the great multitude, who have little opportunity of receiving spiritual instruction

struction through the week, should be sunk in the most deplorable ignorance and vice. But were men careful to employ that sacred day aright; were they to improve it as much for the purposes of religion and eternity, as they improve a season of advantage for their worldly business; what a change would it make upon the face of Christianity among us? Then would they be built up in knowledge, and in holiness, themselves. Then might they be supposed to carry a sense of divine things about with them in their daily conversation, and thereby exhibit more of the character which they profess as an example to others. And as that is the most convenient time for parents, and heads of families, to instill the principles of religion into the minds of those who are under their care, it would likewise be the happy occasion of transmitting the doctrine of salvation, not in its meaning only, but in its powerful efficacy, to succeeding generations.

2dly, If you wish to feel the influence, of the spirit and the faith of prayer, so as to maintain a constant intercourse with heaven, while on the earth; you must watch every opportunity for that pious exercise,

cise. You ought, upon no account, to omit it at the regular returns of morning and evening. If you do not keep these seasons sacred to devotion, but propose to put it off till afterwards, you shall meet with many occurrences, to make you either to hurry it over improperly, or to neglect it altogether. It is not enough, however, that you pay your adorations unto God at these returning seasons: you should likewise cheerfully embrace every other opportunity of drawing near unto him; and your aspirations should be frequently ascending to his throne, even while you are engaged in your ordinary business. — But the principal advice I have to offer upon this point is, that when you go to prayer, you should be at pains to compose and prepare your minds for such a solemn employment. Let some time be spent in serious and deep meditation before you enter upon it. Endeavour to get your hearts affected with a sense of the majesty of that God in whose presence you stand. Think of his amazing condescension, in not only allowing, but inviting, such worthless creatures to approach him. And consider your own internal circumstances — what sins you have committed — what

what mercies you have received — and what wants you need to have supplied. — This is an advice which was much inculcated and exemplified by those persons of the last age who went by the name of Puritans, whose characters, the more I examine, the more I esteem and admire. And they are witnesses to posterity of its beneficial consequences. Indeed how can it be supposed, that a mind occupied with worldly cares, can be in a suitable frame for that spiritual exercise. Therefore, unless it be prepared in the manner that has now been specified, devotion, in most cases, can be nothing but an empty form, without either pleasure or profit to be derived from it.

Lastly, Let me beseech you, who are the real disciples of Christ, by frequent godly conference together, to minister to each other's spiritual benefit, and to be helpers of each other's joy. I know that this is another very unfashionable and obsolete practice which I am attempting to revive. Notwithstanding, it is so strongly founded, not only in scripture, but in human nature, and in the conduct of the world itself, that it is not easy to conceive how the neglect of it can be vindicated u-

pon any rational grounds. How ready are we all to speak of those things which either engage our attention, or interest our heart? Do we not see the men of erudition conversing with one another about whatever is curious in the different parts of science—the men of pleasure, about their various amusements—and the men of business, about their trade and commerce? Do not all, with one consent, acknowledge, by their daily practice, the advantage of conversation, in every branch or article about which they are employed? Is it only then, in matters of everlasting concern, that we must be deprived of this delightful and profitable intercourse? The very proposing of the case, discovers its absurdity in the strongest light. Indeed wherever religion begins to prosper, this will always be one of its inseparable attendants. And it is much to be remarked, that this was the practice by which the people of God were animated and supported, at a time when religion was in a very low and declining state. “Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that fear—” ed

